

VISN 22

Desert Pacific Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center

Overview

Beginning in 1997, Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Centers (MIRECCs) were established by Congress with the goal of bringing best practices in mental health care into the clinical settings of the VA. The MIRECCs conduct research, produce clinical educational programs and products, and enhance clinical treatment to veterans.

About

Psychotic illnesses are associated with a variety of perceptual and cognitive impairments that can impact vocational and social functioning, and quality of life. Unfortunately, available treatments are often only partially effective at addressing the many needs of afflicted individuals. Our approach to schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders is to improve understanding of the underlying neurobiology of these illnesses, to translate this improved understanding to improved clinical practices, and to assure that these improved practices are provided to veterans.

Mission

The mission of the VISN 22, Desert Pacific MIRECC is to improve the long-term functional outcome of patients with chronic psychotic mental disorders, including schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder and psychotic mood disorders. We approach this mission through an integrated program of research, education, and clinical programs aimed at translating findings from the research laboratory into improved clinical care. Moreover, our program spans the spectrum from basic brain biology to the organization of services for veterans.

We believe that we have succeeded in creating a center program that fulfills these goals. All of our laboratories and units – Neuropsychopharmacology, Clinical Neuroscience, Treatment, Imaging, Data Management, Health Services, and Education and Dissemination – have developed a track record of accomplishment. Our programs have strongly supported VA's adoption of a recovery model for severe mental illnesses. This support includes research programs that evaluate innovative pharmacological and psychosocial treatments for improving the community functioning of individuals with psychotic illnesses and programs that facilitate the implementation of recovery-oriented programs in VA clinical settings.

Activities During the Last Budget Year (FY09)

The MIRECC has provided national and local training in recovery-oriented treatments. In partnership with VISN 5, we are training clinicians from all VA networks in psychiatric rehabilitation methods. In VISN 22 we surveyed each of the facilities to determine their needs for recovery-oriented services. We are in the process of responding to these needs through new training programs including special training for peer providers and training in motivational interviewing.

As part of its focus on improving the quality of life for veterans with severe mental illness, the MIRECC has supported research programs to develop interventions to improved functional outcomes. The programs have focused on impaired cognition, one of the important determinants of functional outcome. Ongoing studies are evaluating innovative pharmacological that directly target cognition. In addition, we are continuing to evaluate promising psychosocial treatments such as errorless

learning, social cognition training, cognitive behavior therapy, weight management and supported employment. In the past year, the VISN 22 MIRECC research program has leveraged over \$30M of additional research funding and published more than 30 scientific papers and book chapters.

The VISN 22 MIRECC has two related fellowship programs, one based at the San Diego VA and one based at VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare Center. In addition to mentoring five VA Advanced Fellows in Psychiatry and Psychology, VISN 22 faculty trains two to three dozen graduate students and post-doctoral fellows in their laboratories. The MIRECC offers competitive New Investigator Pilot Grants to support the research and training of junior investigators.

FY 09 Training Activities

- Social Skills Training
- Peer Specialist Certification Training
- Rollout of Mental Health Services Package
 - Behavioral Family Therapy Training
 - Multiple Family Psychoeducation/Group Therapy Training
 - Motivational Interviewing

Leadership

Director – Stephen R. Marder MD (Los Angeles)
Associate Director – Greg Brown, PhD (San Diego)
Associate Director – Christopher Reist, MD (Long Beach)

Contact

The VISN 22, Desert Pacific MIRECC has offices at three locations in Southern California.

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